



## Parenting Styles and the Use of Physical Discipline: An Investigation into Correlates

Ebeveyn Tutumları ve Fiziksel Ceza Kullanımı: Bağıntılar Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Nicel Yıldız Silahlı<sup>1</sup>, Senay Türe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Istanbul Medipol University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Akdeniz University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Social Pediatrics Antalya, Turkey

### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** Parenting is the process of supporting children in their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Parental violence against children is widespread throughout the world. Given the harmful effects of physical punishment, it is important to explore alternative disciplinary methods and promote positive parenting styles. The aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes of parents and their use of physical punishment.

**Material and Method:** This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the Pediatrics Outpatient Clinic of İstanbul Medipol University Hospital between June and December 2022. The study included consenting parents who had children aged between 2 and 6 years and who applied to the clinic during this period. Participants (n:117) completed a questionnaire about socio-demographic characteristics, the 'Parental Attitude Scale' and the use of physical punishment.

**Results:** The study included 117 parents with children aged 2-6 years. Most participants were mothers (78,44%, n=91) with a mean age of 35.02±4.11 years. The total number of children of the participants was 117 and 59 (50.4%) of the children were male. Seventy-seven (83.7%) of the mothers were university graduates. Seventy-one (65.1%) of the participants had only one child. The main characteristic of the parents' attitudes was democracy with a score of 74.99±9.92. Only permissive attitudes were found to be statistically significantly higher among middle- and high-income parents than among low-income parents. Among the participants, 41.6% (n:47) reported using any form of punishment, 16.1% (n:18) reported using physical punishment and 74.1% (n:86) reported using verbal punishment/violence.

**Conclusion:** In our study, it is noteworthy that although the participant parents exhibited a democratic attitude in the foreground, physical punishment was used. Parenting and disciplinary practices should be evaluated during child health follow-up and the family should be mentored about possible damaging disciplinary methods. Appropriate parenting styles can help families develop positive parenting characteristics and promote the development of mentally healthy children. More comprehensive studies are needed on this subject.

**Keywords:** Parenting, parental attitudes, physical punishment, discipline

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Ebeveynlik, çocukların fiziksel, duygusal, sosyal ve zihinsel gelişimlerini destekleme sürecidir. Buna karşın çocuklara yönelik ebeveyn şiddeti dünya genelinde yaygındır. Fiziksel ceza gibi şiddet içeren davranışların zararlı etkileri göz önüne alındığında, alternatif disiplin yöntemlerini keşfetmek ve olumlu ebeveynlik tarzlarını teşvik etmek önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, ebeveynlerin tutumlarını ve fiziksel ceza kullanım durumlarını araştırmaktır.

**Gereç ve Yöntem:** Bu tanımlayıcı kesitsel çalışma, Haziran-Aralık 2022 tarihleri arasında İstanbul Medipol Üniversitesi Hastanesi Çocuk Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları Polikliniği'nde gerçekleştirildi. Çalışmaya, 2 ila 6 yaş arasında çocuğu olan ve bu süre zarfında kliniğe başvuran ebeveynler dahil edildi. Katılımcılar (n:117) sosyo-demografik özellikler, 'Ebeveyn Tutum Ölçeği' ve fiziksel ceza kullanımı hakkında sorular içeren bir anket doldurdu.

**Bulgular:** Çalışmaya 2-6 yaş arası çocukları olan 117 ebeveyn katıldı. Katılımcıların çoğu anneydi (%78,44, n=91) ve yaş ortalaması 35,02±4,11 yıl idi. Katılımcıların toplam çocuk sayısı 117'dir ve çocukların 59'u (%50,4) erkektir. Annelerin yetmiş yedisi (%83,7) üniversite mezunu idi. Katılımcıların yetmiş biri (%65,1) tek çocuk sahibi idi. Ebeveyn tutumlarının temel özelliği 74,99±9,92 puan ile demokrasidir. Sadece izin verici tutumlar orta ve yüksek gelirli ebeveynler arasında düşük gelirli ebeveynlere göre istatistiksel olarak anlamlı derecede daha yüksek bulundu. Katılımcıların %41,6'sı (n:47) herhangi bir ceza metodu kullandığını belirtirken, %16,1'i (n:18) fiziksel ceza kullandığını ve %74,1'i (n:86) sözel ceza/şiddet kullandığını bildirdi.

**Sonuç:** Çalışmamızda, katılımcı ebeveynlerin demokratik bir tutum sergilemeleri ön planda olmasına rağmen fiziksel cezanın kullanılması dikkat çekicidir. Ebeveynlik ve disiplin uygulamaları çocuk sağlığı izlemleri sırasında değerlendirilmeli ve olası zarar verici disiplin yöntemleri konusunda aileye danışmanlık verilmelidir. Uygun ebeveynlik stilleri, ailelerin olumlu ebeveynlik özellikleri geliştirmelerine yardımcı olacak ve zihinsel olarak sağlıklı çocukların gelişimini teşvik edebilir. Bu konuda daha kapsamlı çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ebeveynlik, ebeveynlik tarzı, fiziksel ceza, disiplin

**Corresponding Author:** Nicel YILDIZ SİLAHLI

**Address:** İstanbul Medipol University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, İstanbul, Turkey

**E-mail:** nicelyldz@yahoo.com

**Başvuru Tarihi/Received:** 05.09.2023

**Kabul Tarihi/Accepted:** 28.09.2023



## INTRODUCTION

Parenting is the process of supporting children in their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development (1,2). This process involves providing guidance and discipline with compassion for the psychosocially healthy growth of children. On the other hand, parental violence against children is widespread throughout the world (3–5). Despite the existence of alternative disciplinary methods, some parents may choose to use physical punishment due to its perceived short-term effectiveness and lower effort required (5–7). Physical punishment refers to the use of physical force, such as spanking or hitting, as a means of discipline (4,5). While the effectiveness and appropriateness of physical punishment is controversial, it is clearly detrimental to the psychosocial well-being of children in the long term (8–10). Therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that disciplinary methods should be discussed with families when the infant is 9 months old (9,11). This can help parents understand the potential risks of physical punishment and explore alternative methods to promote positive behaviors in their children (9,11).

Given the harmful effects of physical punishment, it is important to explore alternative disciplinary methods and promote positive parenting practices (8,12). In this study, we aimed to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and the use of physical punishment among parents who attended child health follow-up appointments at our hospital.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study was approved by the Istanbul Medipol University Non-interventional Clinical Researches Ethics Committee (Date: 27.04.2022, Decision No: 414). All procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical rules and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

### Study Design

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the Pediatrics Outpatient Clinic of İstanbul Medipol University Hospital between June and December 2022. The study included all parents who presented to the clinic during this period with a child aged between 2 and 6 years, without chronic diseases in themselves or their child, and who agreed to participate in the study. Prior to their child's participation, eligible parents were provided with detailed information about the study and signed an informed written consent. The questionnaires were self-administered by eligible parents attending a child health follow-up visit. The questionnaire included items on parents' demographic characteristics, parenting styles and disciplinary practices, including the use of physical punishment.

## Measurement and Data Collection

Participants in the study were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first part included questions about their socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, income, job, marital status, and education level. The second part included questions from the Parenting Attitude Scale, which was validated and tested for reliability by Demir et al (13). The scale was designed to measure parenting attitudes and consists of 46 items organized into four sub-dimensions: Democratic (17 items), Authoritarian (11 items), Overprotective (9 items), and Permissive (9 items).<sup>13</sup> High scores obtained from the dimensions indicate that the respondent supports the attitude expressed in that dimension. High scores obtained from the dimensions other than democratic attitude and equality recognition dimension indicate negative parental attitudes and define the parenting style (13).

The third part of the questionnaire included questions about whether parents had used any form of punishment with their children. Specifically, parents were asked to indicate whether they had ever used physical punishment, non-physical punishment, or a combination of both. For those who reported using physical punishment, additional questions were asked about the frequency and severity of the punishment. The questionnaire was administered to parents during their child's visit to the Pediatrics Outpatient Clinic of İstanbul Medipol University Hospital.

## Statistical Analysis

The data collected in the study were entered into the statistical analysis software SPSS 22 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-IBM, International Business Machines Corp., United States) and analyzed using descriptive and comparative statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were presented as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, median, minimum, maximum, and interquartile range (IQR) values. The normality assumption was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, histogram, Q-Q plot, skewness, and kurtosis values. For analyzing the differences between numerical data of two groups, the Independent Samples t-test was used when the data followed a normal distribution, while the Mann-Whitney U test was used when the data did not follow a normal distribution. The relationships between numerical data were evaluated using the Pearson correlation test when the data followed a normal distribution, and the Spearman correlation test was used when the data did not follow a normal distribution. Categorical data were analyzed using the chi-square test. The Pearson chi-square test was used when the proportion of cells with an expected value less than 5 was less than 20%, and Fisher's exact test was used when the expected value was greater than 20%.



## RESULTS

The study included 117 parents with 174 (minimum:1; maximum:5) children between the ages of 2 and 6 years old who completed the questionnaire. Of the participants, %78,44 were mothers with a mean age of  $35.02 \pm 4.11$  years, while %21,55 ( $n=25$ ) were fathers with a mean age of  $39.36 \pm 5.52$  years. The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in **Table 1**.

The Parental Attitude Scale used in this study consisted of four sub-factors: Democratic, Authoritarian, Overprotective, and Permissive.<sup>13</sup> The participants' scores on these sub-factors are presented in detail in **Table 2**.

To investigate whether there were any significant differences in the scores between mothers and fathers, the scores for each of the four sub-factors were compared using independent samples t-tests. The results, presented in **Table 3**, indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers on any of the sub-factors ( $p > 0.05$ ). **Table 3** presents a detailed summary of the relationship between the participants' scores on the Parental Attitude Scale and their sociodemographic characteristics. Overall, when the parental attitudes of all participating parents were evaluated based on the gender of their children, it was observed that all parents exhibited overprotective attitudes toward their daughters. Among the mothers, those with daughters had significantly higher scores on both the overprotective and democratic sub-factors compared to those with sons, as shown in **Table 3**. Among the fathers, higher scores on the authoritarian sub-factor were observed for those with male children, although this difference was not statistically significant (**Table 3**).

Only permissive attitudes were found to be statistically significantly higher among middle- and high-income parents than among low-income parents (**Table 3**). Mothers with an educational level less than university level had statistically significantly higher scores only in overprotective attitude compared to mothers with higher educational level, whereas this difference was not found in any parental attitude in fathers (**Table 3**). There was no statistical difference in parental attitude scores based on the number of children. Families whose children attended nursery or kindergarten were found to have statistically higher authoritarian attitude scores than those whose children did not attend nursery or kindergarten (**Table 3**).

When the correlation relationship between the age of the participant parents and parental attitude scores was examined, it was found that the permissive attitude

score increased statistically significantly as the age of the mother increased, and the democratic score increased statistically significantly as the age of the father decreased, and the results are shown in detail in **Table 4**. When the age of the child and the parental attitude scores of the mothers and fathers were examined, it was found that as the age of the child increased, the authoritarian attitude scores of the mothers increased and the permissive attitude scores of the fathers decreased and these were statistically significant (**Table 4**).

**Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristic of the Participants**

| Characteristics (n=number of participants answering the relevant question) |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Age (M±SD) (min-max)   |                    |
| Mother (n=91)  | 35,02±4,11 (25-47) |
| Father (n=25)  | 39,36±5,52 (31-53) |
| Age groups of children (n=117)   | N (%)              |
| 2 years  | 28 (23,9%)         |
| 3 years  | 15 (12,8%)         |
| 4 years  | 28 (23,9%)         |
| 5 years  | 27 (23,1%)         |
| 6 years  | 19 (16,2%)         |
| Gender of children (n=117)   | N (%)              |
| Girl   | 58 (49,6%)         |
| Boy  | 59 (50,4%)         |
| Mothers' education level (n=91)  | N (%)              |
| High school and under  | 15 (16,3%)         |
| University   | 77 (83,7%)         |
| Fathers' education level n(%) (n=25)                                       |                    |
| High school and under  | 6 (24%)            |
| University   | 19 (76%)           |
| Siblings n(%) (n=109)  |                    |
| No sibling   | 71 (65,1%)         |
| At least one sibling   | 38 (34,9%)         |
| Income n(%) (n=105)  |                    |
| Low  | 76 (72,4%)         |
| Medium or high   | 29 (27,6%)         |

n: number, M: mean, SD: standard deviation.

**Table 2. Characteristics of Participants' Parental Attitude Scale Scores.**

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Democratic Attitude     |            |
| M±SD                    | 74,99±9,92 |
| Median (range)          | 78 (20-85) |
| IQR                     | 9          |
| Authoritarian Attitude  |            |
| M±SD                    | 18,62±4,53 |
| Median (range)          | 18 (8-32)  |
| IQR                     | 5          |
| Overprotective Attitude |            |
| M±SD                    | 30,74±6,33 |
| Median (range)          | 31 (11-45) |
| IQR                     | 8          |
| Permissive Attitude     |            |
| M±SD                    | 21,19±5,02 |
| Median (range)          | 21 (7-35)  |
| IQR                     | 7          |

**Table 3. Association between Sociodemographic Characteristics and Parental Attitude Scale Scores**

| Sociodemographic variables                                   |                              | Democratic Attitude |         | Authoritarian Attitude |         | Overprotective Attitude |         | Permissive Attitude |         |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
|  |                              | M±SD                | p-value | M±SD                   | p-value | M±SD                    | p-value | M±SD                | p-value |
| Parent   | Mother (n=91)                | 75,13±10,12         | 0.773   | 18,33±4,05             | 0.293   | 30,60±6,51              | 0.635   | 20,83±5,05          | 0.136   |
|  | Father (n=25)                | 74,48±9,32          |         | 19,68±5,96             |         | 31,28±5,74              |         | 22,52±4,77          |         |
| PAS according to children's gender                           | Female (n=58)                | 76,67±7,18          | 0.068   | 18,19±4,24             | 0.316   | 31,97±5,81              | 0.038   | 21,34±5,07          | 0.740   |
|  | Male (n=59)                  | 73,34±11,85         |         | 19,03±4,79             |         | 29,54±6,64              |         | 21,03±5,01          |         |
| PAS according to children's gender of the mothers            | Female (n=48)                | 77,27±5,92          | 0.040   | 18,46±3,98             | 0.746   | 31,88±5,92              | 0.049   | 20,81±5,00          | 0.979   |
|  | Male (n=49)                  | 72,80±12,95         |         | 18,18±4,16             |         | 29,20±6,89              |         | 20,84±5,17          |         |
| PAS according to children's gender of the fathers            | Female (n=10)                | 73,80±11,51         | 0.773   | 16,90±5,38             | 0.055   | 32,40±5,54              | 0.438   | 23,90±4,84          | 0.246   |
|  | Male (n=15)                  | 74,93±7,95          |         | 21,53±5,75             |         | 30,53±5,95              |         | 21,60±4,65          |         |
| PAS according to income levels of the parents                | Low (n=29)                   | 74,86±13,92         | 0.869   | 17,52±4,86             | 0.127   | 31,14±7,41              | 0.486   | 19,21±5,24          | 0.045   |
|  | Medium or high (n=76)        | 75,33±6,84          |         | 19,04±4,40             |         | 30,16±6,00              |         | 21,38±4,76          |         |
| PAS according to mothers' educational level                  | High school and under (n=15) | 78,27±4,21          | 0.191   | 18,20±4,58             | 0.907   | 34,20±5,82              | 0.018   | 19,93±5,09          | 0.458   |
|  | University (n=77)            | 74,52±10,82         |         | 18,35±3,97             |         | 29,90±6,43              |         | 21,00±5,06          |         |
| PAS according to fathers' educational level                  | High school and under (n=6)  | 72,67±16,40         | 0.741   | 21,83±8,56             | 0.470   | 30,17±5,34              | 0.597   | 26,00±6,92          | 0.172   |
|  | University(n=19)             | 75,05±6,30          |         | 19,00±5,00             |         | 31,63±5,96              |         | 21,42±3,42          |         |
| PAS according to the number of children                      | No sibling (n=71)            | 75,56±6,73          | 0.500   | 18,63±4,40             | 0.957   | 30,93±5,89              | 0.695   | 21,37±4,43          | 0.636   |
|  | At least one sibling (n=46)  | 74,11±13,48         |         | 18,59±4,76             |         | 30,46±7,02              |         | 20,91±5,86          |         |
| PAS according to preschool attendance status of the children | Yes (n=80)                   | 74,39±11,08         | 0.335   | 19,26±4,79             | 0.023   | 30,61±6,33              | 0.744   | 21,00±4,69          | 0.554   |
|  | No (n=37)                    | 76,30±6,69          |         | 17,22±3,59             |         | 31,03±6,43              |         | 21,59±5,72          |         |

PAS: Parenteral Attitude Score. M: mean, SD: standard deviation

**Table 4. Correlation Analyses of the Relationship between Some Sociodemographic Characteristics and Parental Attitudes.**

|   |   | Democratic Attitude | Authoritarian Attitude | Overprotective Attitude | Permissive Attitude |
|---|---|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Mother's age (n=91)   | r | 0.136               | 0.092                  | -0.016                  | 0.231               |
|   | p | 0.197               | 0.387                  | 0.878                   | 0.028               |
| Father's age (n=25)   | r | -0.434              | 0.112                  | -0.318                  | 0.127               |
|   | p | 0.030               | 0.593                  | 0.121                   | 0.546               |
| Parental age (n=116)  | r | -0.014              | 0.135                  | -0.066                  | 0.235               |
|   | p | 0.882               | 0.148                  | 0.479                   | 0.011               |
| Association between child's age and maternal attitudes (n=91) | r | -0.040              | 0.254                  | 0.041                   | -0.070              |
|   | p | 0.702               | 0.014                  | 0.695                   | 0.508               |
| Association between child's age and paternal attitudes (n=25) | r | -0.329              | 0.281                  | 0.000                   | -0.491              |
|   | p | 0.109               | 0.174                  | 0.998                   | 0.013               |

Among the participants, 41.6% (n:47) reported using any form of punishment, 16.1% (n:18) reported using physical punishment and 74.1% (n:86) reported using verbal punishment/violence (intimidation, yelling, humiliation, etc.). The relationship between the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and the frequency and variety of punishment use was examined and the findings are summarized in detail in **Table 5**. It was found that only parents whose children did not attend kindergarten/nursery school used verbal punishment/violence less frequently at a statistically significant level, while statistical significance was not found in other findings.

When the parental attitudes of those who used any punishment method and those who did not use any punishment method were analyzed among all the participating parents, it was found that the permissive attitude scores of the parents who did not use any punishment method were statistically higher. Examining mothers and fathers separately, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between the parenting attitudes of mothers, while the overprotective and permissive attitudes of fathers were statistically higher among those who did not use any punishment method, and the results are summarized in **Table 6**.



**Table 5. The Relationship between Sociodemographic Characteristics and the Frequency of Different Punishment Applications.**

|   | Frequency of applying any punishment |      |          | Frequency of applying physical punishment |      |          | Frequency of using verbal punishment |      |          |
|---|--------------------------------------|------|----------|---|------|----------|--------------------------------------|------|----------|
|   | n                                    | (%)  | p-values | n   | (%)  | p-values | n                                    | (%)  | p-values |
| Parent                                      |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| Mother (n:90)                               | 35                                   | 38.9 | 0.249    | 14  | 15.7 | 0.532    | 67                                   | 73.6 | 0.810    |
| Father (n:23)                               | 12                                   | 52.2 |          | 4   | 17.4 |          | 19                                   | 76   |          |
| Total (n:113)                               | 47                                   | 41.6 |          | 18  | 16.1 |          | 86                                   | 74.1 |          |
| Mothers' Educational level                  |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| High school and under (n:15)                | 7                                    | 46.7 | 0.498    | 3   | 20   | 0.433    | 12                                   | 80   | 0.398    |
| University (n:75)                           | 28                                   | 37.3 |          | 11  | 14.9 |          | 55                                   | 72.4 |          |
| Total (n:90)                                | 35                                   | 38.9 |          | 14  | 15.7 |          | 67                                   | 73.6 |          |
| Fathers' Educational level                  |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| High school and under (n:6)                 | 3                                    | 50   | 0.635    | 2   | 33.3 | 0.270    | 3                                    | 50   | 0.125    |
| University (n:17)                           | 9                                    | 52.9 |          | 2   | 11.8 |          | 16                                   | 84.2 |          |
| Total(n:23)                                 | 12                                   | 52.2 |          | 4   | 17.4 |          | 19                                   | 76   |          |
| Parents' Educational level                  |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| High school and under (n:21)                | 10                                   | 47.6 | 0.535    | 5   | 23.8 | 0.223    | 15                                   | 71.4 | 0.754    |
| University (n:92)                           | 37                                   | 40.2 |          | 13  | 14.6 |          | 71                                   | 74.7 |          |
| Total (n:113)                               | 47                                   | 41.6 |          | 18  | 16.1 |          | 86                                   | 74.1 |          |
| Income                                      |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| Low (n:28)                                  | 11                                   | 39.3 | 0.811    | 7   | 25   | 0.181    | 59                                   | 77.6 | 0.204    |
| Medium or high (n:74)                       | 31                                   | 41.9 |          | 11  | 14.9 |          | 19                                   | 65.5 |          |
| Total (n:102)                               | 42                                   | 41.2 |          | 18  | 17.6 |          | 78                                   | 74.3 |          |
| Number of siblings                          |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| No sibling (n:68)                           | 25                                   | 36.8 | 0.201    | 8   | 11.8 | 0.123    | 54                                   | 76.1 | 0.553    |
| At least one sibling (n:45)                 | 22                                   | 48.9 |          | 10  | 22.7 |          | 32                                   | 71.1 |          |
| Total (n:113)                               | 47                                   | 41.6 |          | 18  | 16.1 |          | 86                                   | 74.1 |          |
| Preschool attendance status of the children |                                      |      |          |   |      |          |                                      |      |          |
| Yes (n:78)                                  | 37                                   | 47.4 | 0.060    | 12  | 15.6 | 0.835    | 63                                   | 79.7 | 0.044    |
| No (n:35)                                   | 10                                   | 28.6 |          | 6   | 17.1 |          | 23                                   | 62.2 |          |
| Total (n:113)                               | 47                                   | 41.6 |          | 18  | 16.1 |          | 86                                   | 74.1 |          |

**Table 6. The Relationship between Forms of Punishment and Parental Attitude Scores.**

|  |            | Democratic Attitude |          | Authoritarian Attitude |          | Overprotective Attitude |          | Permissive Attitude |          |
|--|------------|---------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|  |            | M±SD                | p-values | M±SD                   | p-values | M±SD                    | p-values | M±SD                | p-values |
| Parents' any punishment application      | Yes (n:47) | 76,06±6,09          | 0.578    | 19,72±4,73             | 0.054    | 30,02±6,16              | 0.176    | 20,30±5,01          | 0.042    |
|  | No(n:66)   | 75,05±11,39         |          | 18,12±3,97             |          | 31,64±6,26              |          | 22,14±4,43          |          |
| Mothers' any punishment application      | Yes(n:35)  | 76,77±5,28          | 0.388    | 19,26±4,09             | 0.159    | 30,31±6,29              | 0.539    | 20,26±5,53          | 0.165    |
|  | No(n:55)   | 74,98±11,43         |          | 18,09±3,59             |          | 31,16±6,40              |          | 21,67±4,03          |          |
| Fathers' any punishment application      | Yes(n:12)  | 74,00±7,93          | 0.745    | 21,08±6,24             | 0.275    | 29,17±5,93              | 0.049    | 20,42±3,23          | 0.047    |
|  | No(n:11)   | 75,36±11,72         |          | 18,27±5,72             |          | 34,00±5,07              |          | 24,45±5,69          |          |
| Parents' physical punishment application | Yes (n:18) | 74,22±9,83          | 0.362    | 21,17±5,68             | 0.012    | 29,06±5,19              | 0.139    | 19,72±5,23          | 0.111    |
|  | No(n:94)   | 76,21±8,16          |          | 18,37±3,94             |          | 31,43±6,34              |          | 21,68±4,63          |          |
| Mothers' physical punishment application | Yes (n:14) | 77,07±5,16          | 0.669    | 19,57±4,41             | 0.295    | 28,79±5,46              | 0.167    | 19,43±5,52          | 0.147    |
|  | No(n:75)   | 76,05±8,59          |          | 18,40±3,70             |          | 31,33±6,40              |          | 21,43±4,53          |          |
| Fathers' physical punishment application | Yes (n:4)  | 64,25±16,25         | 0.015    | 26,75±6,70             | 0.007    | 30,00±4,69              | 0.597    | 20,75±4,57          | 0.488    |
|  | No(n:19)   | 76,84±6,5           |          | 18,26±4,88             |          | 31,79±6,25              |          | 22,68±5,04          |          |
| Parents' verbal punishment application   | Yes (n:86) | 74,62±7,70          | 0.112    | 19,88±4,35             | 0.000    | 30,64±6,01              | 0.606    | 20,84±4,62          | 0.216    |
|  | No(n:30)   | 77,63±11,66         |          | 15,10±2,94             |          | 31,33±7,18              |          | 22,17±6,06          |          |
| Mothers' verbal punishment application   | Yes (n:67) | 75,42±7,12          | 0.681    | 19,43±3,88             | 0.000    | 30,55±6,12              | 0.733    | 20,58±4,92          | 0.472    |
|  | No(n:24)   | 76,29±12,70         |          | 15,28±2,90             |          | 31,08±7,52              |          | 21,46±5,55          |          |
| Fathers' verbal punishment application   | Yes (n:19) | 71,79±9,11          | 0.007    | 21,47±5,53             | 0.005    | 30,95±5,75              | 0.617    | 21,74±3,33          | 0.148    |
|  | No(n:6)    | 83,00±1,89          |          | 14,00±3,09             |          | 32,33±6,12              |          | 25,00±7,72          |          |

The difference between the parental attitudes of the participants who used physical punishment and those who did not use physical punishment was examined, and it was found that the authoritarian attitude score of the parents who used physical punishment was statistically higher. Analyzing mothers and fathers separately, it was found that fathers who used physical punishment had higher authoritarian attitude scores and lower democratic attitude scores, and this difference was statistically significant; there was no statistical difference between the mean parental attitude scores of mothers

When the mean parenting attitudes of the participants who used verbal punishment/violence against their children and those who did not use verbal punishment/violence against their children were analyzed, it was found that the authoritarian attitudes of those who used verbal violence were statistically higher among all participants and among both mothers and fathers when analyzed separately. It was also found that the democratic attitude scores of the fathers who perpetrated verbal violence were statistically lower than those who did not, and the findings are detailed in **Table 6**.

Regarding the frequency of use of any punishment method by the participant parents according to the age groups of the children, it was found that the frequency of use of punishment was 50, 46.4 and 65.4 per cent in the 3, 4 and 5 age groups, respectively, and these rates were statistically significantly higher than those in the 2 and 6 age groups. No statistical difference was observed in the frequency of physical and verbal punishment methods according to the age groups of the children and the findings are summarized in detail in **Table 7**.

The frequency and variety of the use of punishment and the characteristics of parents' spending time with their children were analyzed. It was found that the frequency of physical punishment was statistically lower in parents who had the habit of reading books with their children. Parents who spent time with their children through the media had a statistically significant higher frequency of verbal punishment/violence (**Table 7**).

Parental attitudes were analyzed according to parents' habits of spending time with their children, and it was found that the permissive attitude scores of parents who did not have the habit of reading books with their children were statistically higher. The findings are summarized in detail in **Table 8**.

## DISCUSSION

Parenting is a reciprocal interaction process in which children are guided to adapt to the environment during their development (1,6). Parenting is a reciprocal interaction process in which children are guided to adapt to the environment during their development. It involves many psychosocial factors, especially the parents' own experiences and knowledge, which determine the parenting style (3,4). Although parents adopt different parenting styles, current studies draw attention to the fact that discipline methods for children should be positive, respectful and based on compassion (1,2,4). This study showed the relationship between parental attitudes, sociodemographic characteristics and punishment behaviors towards children. It was noteworthy that verbal punishment was widely used among parents, as well as physical punishment.

The use of punishment under the guise of disciplining children is prevalent in societies (9,14). The absence of statistical variation in the frequency and diversity of punishment by parents based on their sociodemographic characteristics in this study suggests that the punishment of children is still a widespread practice across all segments of society. We found that the frequency of

**Table 7. The Relationship between Child Age Group, Parent-Child Communication, and Diversity in Punishment Use.**

|                                      | Frequency of applying any punishment (n/%) |           |         | Frequency of applying physical punishment(n/%) |           |          | Frequency of using verbal punishment (n/%) |           |          |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------|---------|--|-----------|----------|--|-----------|----------|
|                                      | Yes  | No        | p-value | Yes  | No        | p-values | Yes  | No        | p-values |
| Age groups of the children (years)   |  |           |         |  |           |          |  |           |          |
| 2                                    | 6 (23,1)                                   | 20 (76,9) | 0,008   | 4 (15,4)                                       | 22 (84,6) | 0,479    | 16 (57,1)                                  | 12 (42,9) | 0,054    |
| 3                                    | 7 (50)                                     | 7 (50)    |         | 4 (28,6)                                       | 10 (71,4) |          | 13 (86,7)                                  | 2 (13,3)  |          |
| 4                                    | 13 (46,4)                                  | 15 (53,6) |         | 2 (7,4)  | 25 (92,6) |          | 18 (66,7)                                  | 9 (33,3)  |          |
| 5                                    | 17 (65,4)                                  | 9 (34,6)  |         | 4 (15,4)                                       | 22 (84,6) |          | 22 (81,5)                                  | 5 (18,5)  |          |
| 6                                    | 4 (21,1)                                   | 15 (78,9) |         | 4 (21,1)                                       | 15 (78,9) |          | 17 (89,5)                                  | 2 (10,5)  |          |
| Total                                | 47 (41,6)                                  | 66 (58,4) |         | 18 (16,1)                                      | 94 (83,9) |          | 86 (74,1)                                  | 30 (25,9) |          |
| Reading books with children          |  |           |         |  |           |          |  |           |          |
| Yes (n:78)                           | 34 (43,6)                                  | 44 (56,4) | 0,520   | 9 (11,5)                                       | 69 (88,5) | 0,048    | 60 (74,1)                                  | 21 (25,9) | 0,981    |
| No (n:35)                            | 13 (37,1)                                  | 22 (62,9) |         | 9 (26,5)                                       | 25 (73,5) |          | 26 (74,3)                                  | 9 (25,7)  |          |
| Total (n:113)                        | 47 (41,6)                                  | 66 (58,4) |         | 18 (16,1)                                      | 94 (83,9) |          | 86 (74,1)                                  | 30 (25,9) |          |
| Spending time on media with children |  |           |         |  |           |          |  |           |          |
| Yes (n:50)                           | 23 (46)                                    | 27 (54)   | 0,397   | 8 (16,3)                                       | 41 (83,7) | 0,948    | 44 (84,6)                                  | 8 (15,4)  | 0,020    |
| No (n:63)                            | 24 (38,1)                                  | 39 (61,9) |         | 10 (15,9)                                      | 53 (84,1) |          | 42 (65,6)                                  | 22 (34,4) |          |
| Total (n:113)                        | 47 (41,6)                                  | 66 (58,4) |         | 18 (16,1)                                      | 94 (83,9) |          | 86 (74,1)                                  | 30 (25,9) |          |
| Doing homework together              |  |           |         |  |           |          |  |           |          |
| Yes (n:43)                           | 22 (51,2)                                  | 21 (48,8) | 0,106   | 7 (16,7)                                       | 35 (83,3) | 0,894    | 32 (76,2)                                  | 10 (23,8) | 0,704    |
| No (n:70)                            | 25 (35,7)                                  | 45 (64,3) |         | 11 (15,7)                                      | 59 (84,3) |          | 54 (73)                                    | 20 (27)   |          |
| Total (n:113)                        | 47 (41,6)                                  | 66 (58,4) |         | 18 (16,1)                                      | 94 (83,9) |          | 86 (74,1)                                  | 30 (25,9) |          |

**Table 8. Examination of the Relationship between Parents' Characteristics of Spending Time with Their Children and Parental Attitude Scores.**

|                                      |     | Democratic Attitude |          | Authoritarian Attitude |          | Overprotective Attitude |          | Permissive Attitude |          |
|--------------------------------------|-----|---------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|                                      |     | M±SD                | p-values | M±SD                   | p-values | M±SD                    | p-values | M±SD                | p-values |
| Reading books with children          | Yes | 75,54±9,33          | 0,369    | 18,35±4,35             | 0,337    | 30,17±6,65              | 0,145    | 20,21±4,64          | 0,001    |
|                                      | No  | 73,75±11,17         |          | 19,22±4,91             |          | 32,03±5,42              |          | 23,39±5,22          |          |
| Spending time on media with children | Yes | 74,26±10,40         | 0,473    | 19,09±5,06             | 0,300    | 30,15±6,28              | 0,360    | 20,83±5,01          | 0,486    |
|                                      | No  | 75,59±9,54          |          | 18,22±4,03             |          | 31,23±6,38              |          | 21,48±5,05          |          |
| Doing homework together              | Yes | 75,1±10,81          | 0,903    | 19,42±4,84             | 0,145    | 30,35±6,34              | 0,610    | 20,88±4,22          | 0,481    |
|                                      | No  | 74,91±9,43          |          | 18,15±4,20             |          | 30,97±6,36              |          | 21,36±5,45          |          |



verbal punishment/violence was 74.1% in this study, which is a distressing indication of the prevalence of emotional abuse that children are subjected to. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to the short- and long-term effects of physical and emotional abuse that children experience under the guise of disciplining and to minimize these effects (4,8,11).

Child health organizations and academics have emphasized that physical punishment violates children's rights, endangers their health and development, and stressed the importance of raising awareness among families (4,11,14). In the United States, about half of parents reported spanking their children in the past year, and a third reported spanking in the past week (14,15). In our study group, however, this rate was only 16.1%. The low rate may be due to difficulties in expressing the problem or avoiding the topic. Further extensive studies should be conducted to determine the prevalence.

Parents often use punishment to change undesired behavior in addition to stressful life events (16,17). Scientific recommendations are in the direction of reviewing parental discipline methods during child health follow-up (1,9,18). In our country, a limited number of studies in this direction draw attention to the use of punishment methods in early childhood.

It was found that fathers with male children exhibited slightly more authoritarian attitudes than fathers with female children, but this difference was not statistically significant. However, the number of participating fathers was small in our study, and we think that the results may differ with a larger sample size that includes fathers. In a meta-analysis, it was reported that compared to fathers, mothers were perceived to be more accepting, sensitive, and supportive, while also being behaviorally more controlling, demanding, and autonomy-giving (19). Similarly, in studies comparing parents on overall parenting style constructs, mothers tended to be more authoritative than fathers, while fathers tended to be more authoritarian than mothers (19). In a worldwide analysis of data from more than 15 countries, age and gender were not found to affect these differences between parents (19). In our study, fathers who used physical and verbal punishment exhibited more authoritarian and less democratic attitudes, which was statistically significant. We think that it is crucial to involve fathers in child examination processes, discuss positive parenting, learn their thoughts on this subject, and provide appropriate counseling to fathers during child health follow-ups.

Another noteworthy finding in our study is that the overprotective attitude score increased as the level of parental education decreased. Similarly, in previous studies, it was pointed out that overprotective attitude increased in parents with low education level (16,20).

Overprotection reduces the child's self-confidence and prevents the child's ability to make decisions on their own (8,21).

The parents with lower income levels exhibited less permissive attitudes. There may be many social and cultural reasons why parents with lower income levels are not permissive (18,22). Generally, parents with lower income levels tend to have lower levels of education and more children (14,18,22). Considering the fact that mothers with lower education levels are more overprotective and less permissive towards their children in this study, these parents may have more limited time and opportunities for their children. At the same time, they may need more to develop their positive parenting capacities to spend more quality time with their children. In order to determine what these needs are, more comprehensive studies to be conducted in this field may be guiding.

A further remarkable finding of this study was that parents who spent time reading books with their children used less physical punishment, whereas those who spent time with media used more verbal punishment/violence. We think that efforts to increase parents' capacity to spend quality time with their children may decrease the physical and verbal punishment applied by parents. Especially considering the high frequency of screen use among parents and children today, it would be beneficial to examine the relationship between screen use and parental attitudes with new studies using a larger sample size.

Studies have shown that the punishment methods used in child rearing have negative effects on children's psychosocial development (10,12,23). However, some parents see punishment as a means of disciplining their children (4,16). As seen in our study, especially authoritarian parents may resort to physical punishment in order to set limits or make the child do what they want (7,15). Nevertheless, since physical punishment is not a socially acceptable or normalized situation, participants may give socially desirable answers to such questions, especially in studies (22,24). It may have been easier for the participants to express verbal shouting/angering/punishing the child because it is more socially acceptable.

Research has reported that many parents use verbal expressions of disapproval as a form of punishment to change unwanted behaviors (5,17). Such reprimands are temporarily effective in immediately stopping or reducing undesirable behaviors when used infrequently and targeted at specific behaviors (22,25,26). However, when used indiscriminately and frequently, verbal reprimands lose their effectiveness and may even reinforce unwanted behaviors by increasing the attention focused on the child (22,25,26). Verbal reprimands should not damage the child's self-esteem and should be directed at the

unwanted behaviors (22,25,26). Parents were more likely to use verbal correction or punishment in our study. On the other hand, it may have been easier for parents to express verbal reprimands in a social context.

As reported in the literature, we did not find any difference between physical punishment and gender disruption in our study group. Each parent has a different understanding of how to practice parenting, and not all parents practice the same way (8,21,24). They may take different directions based on their individual experiences, what they learned from their own parents, educational and cultural norms that shape their understanding and methods of parenting (1,27). Research emphasizes the importance of positive parenting for the psychosocial wellbeing of the child, even though practices may vary (3,4,8). There is a need to assess the situation in our country by carrying out extensive field studies in this area and to guide parents in monitoring their children's health.

Changing discipline practices may take time and be gradual but should be a goal for pediatricians and parents (1,11). Because opinions about discipline are formed in childhood, discussing discipline with parents can be difficult and emotionally charged. Often, parents use the pattern they learned from their own parents (17,21). However, considering that all kinds of ill-treatment against the child should be reviewed in current practices, it would be in the best interest of the child to question the disciplinary methods applied by the parents in the public eye. Discussing this issue with the family during the follow-up of the child's health by the pediatrician will enable the family to review their own patterns of behavior and find possible solutions.

## CONCLUSION

In our study, it is noteworthy that although the participant parents exhibited a democratic attitude in the foreground, physical punishment was used. Parenting and disciplinary practices should be evaluated during child health follow-up and the family should be mentored about possible damaging disciplinary methods. Appropriate parenting styles can help families develop positive parenting characteristics and promote the development of mentally healthy children. More comprehensive studies are needed on this subject.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of the sample is its size and further analysis with a larger sample is needed. Other limitations are that individuals abstain and give ideal answers to direct assessment questions related to physical punishment. However, what is expressed in the respondents' answers may not necessarily reflect how they would act in a real situation.

## ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

**Ethics Committee Approval:** This study was approved by the Istanbul Medipol University Non-interventional Clinical Researches Ethics Committee (Date: 27.04.2022, Decision No: 414).

**Informed Consent:** All patients signed the free and informed consent form.

**Referee Evaluation Process:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Financial Disclosure:** The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Author Contributions:** All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

## REFERENCES

- Bradley RH, Iida M, Pennar A, Owen MT, Vandell DL. The Dialectics of Parenting: Changes in the Interplay of Maternal Behaviors during Early and Middle Childhood. *J Child Fam Stud.* 2017;26(11):3214–25.
- Joseph M V, John J. Impact of parenting styles on child development. *Global Academic Society Journal: Social Science Insight [Internet].* 2008;1(5):16–25. Available from: [www.ScholarArticles.net](http://www.ScholarArticles.net)
- Ardi Z, Aulia GZ. The analysis of the parenting implications on the emotional closeness of parent-child improvement. *Journal of Educational and Learning Studies.* 2020 Oct 15;3(2):98.
- Hornor G, Quinones SG, Boudreaux D, et al. Building a Safe and Healthy America: Eliminating Corporal Punishment via Positive Parenting. *J Pediatr Health Care.* 2020;34(2):136–44.
- Prohibiting all corporal punishment of children: laying the foundations for non-violent childhoods Together to #ENDviolence Solutions Summit Series. 2021.
- Fatima H, Zhao S, Yue A, Li S, Shi Y. Parental Discipline and Early Childhood Development in Rural China. *Sustainability (Switzerland).* 2022;14(4).
- Smith JR, Brooks-Gunn J. Correlates and Consequences of Harsh Discipline for Young Children. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med [Internet].* 1997;151:777–86.
- Cornell AH, Frick PJ. The moderating effects of parenting styles in the association between behavioral inhibition and parent-reported guilt and empathy in preschool children. *J Clin Child Adolesc Psychol* 2007;36(3):305–18.
- Zolotor AJ. Corporal punishment. Vol. 61, *Pediatric Clinics of North America.* W.B. Saunders; 2014. p. 971–8.
- Affi TO, Mota N, MacMillan HL, Sareen J. Harsh physical punishment in childhood and adult physical health. *Pediatrics.* 2013;132(2).
- Sege RD, Siegel BS. Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children [Internet]. Available from: [http://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-pdf/142/6/e20183112/1232197/peds\\_20183112.pdf](http://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-pdf/142/6/e20183112/1232197/peds_20183112.pdf)
- Cuartas J, Weissman DG, Sheridan MA, Lengua L, McLaughlin KA. Corporal Punishment and Elevated Neural Response to Threat in Children. *Child Dev.* 2021;92(3):821–32.
- Demir EK, Şendil G. Ebeveyn Tutum Ölçeği (ETÖ). 2008;11(21):15–25.
- Finkelhor D, Turner H, Wormuth BK, Vanderminde J, Hamby S. Corporal Punishment: Current Rates from a National Survey. *J Child Fam Stud.* 2019;28(7):1991–7.
- Hines CT, Kalil A, Ryan RM. Differences in Parents' Attitudes Toward Spanking Across Socioeconomic Status and Region, 1986–2016. *Soc Indic Res.* 2022;160(1):133–58.





16. Grogan-Kaylor A, Burlaka V, Ma J, Lee S, Castillo B, Churakova I. Predictors of parental use of corporal punishment in Ukraine. *Child Youth Serv Rev*. 2018;88:66–73.
17. Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A, Kress H. Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates. *Pediatrics*. 2016;137(3):e20154079.
18. Cuartas J. Corporal punishment and early childhood development in 49 low- and middle-income countries. *Child Abuse Negl*. 2021;120.
19. Yaffe Y. Systematic review of the differences between mothers and fathers in parenting styles and practices. *Current Psychology*. 2023;42(19):16011–24.
20. Jun M, Lee SY, Shim TE. A study on the subjectivity of South Korean parents regarding corporal punishment in early childhood. *Child Abuse Negl*. 2023;140.
21. Taylor CA, Moeller W, Hamvas L, Rice JC. Parents' professional sources of advice regarding child discipline and their use of corporal punishment. *Clin Pediatr (Phila)*. 2013;52(2):147–55.
22. Lokot M, Bhatia A, Kenny L, Cislighi B. Corporal punishment, discipline and social norms: A systematic review in low- and middle-income countries. Vol. 55, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. Elsevier Ltd; 2020.
23. Wang F, Wang M, Xing X. Attitudes mediate the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment in China. *Child Abuse Negl*. 2018;76:34–43.
24. Gustafsson K. Selective parenting programs for parents with foreign backgrounds: cultural imperialism or democratic practices in social work? *Nordic Social Work Res* 2020;10(4):317–29.
25. Chiocca EM. American Parents' Attitudes and Beliefs About Corporal Punishment: An Integrative Literature Review. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*. 2017;31(3):372–83.
26. Holden GW, Brown AS, Baldwin AS, Caderao KC. Research findings can change attitudes about corporal punishment. *Child Abuse Negl*. 2014;38(5):902–8.
27. Ciciolla L, Curlee AS, Karageorge J, Luthar SS. When Mothers and Fathers Are Seen as Disproportionately Valuing Achievements: Implications for Adjustment Among Upper Middle Class Youth. *J Youth Adolesc*. 2017;46(5):1057–75.